



Healthy Families

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Healthy Families

Families Learn Together

You are your child's first teacher. When children learn at home, they do better in school. Children want to learn. They need to see learning in action. Try doing these things together:

- Pick a special time each day to read together — start when your child is a baby
- Make books special—make a special space on a shelf for your child to keep books
- Go to the library for books and activities
- Make family albums with pictures and stories
- Go to a children's museum
- Limit TV watching
- Use everyday activities for learning:
 - ➡ Make shopping lists
 - ➡ Read signs and labels at the store
 - ➡ Count money
 - ➡ Read street signs
 - ➡ Read recipes and measure ingredients when cooking



Make story time part of the day. Some books young children might like include: *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown, *Peter's Chair* by Ezra Jack Keats, *Ten, Nine, Eight* by Molly Bang, *More, More, Said The Baby* by Vera B. Williams, *I'll Do It Myself* by Mercer Meyer, and *My Special Best Words* by John Steptoe.

For parents who need help with reading, family literacy programs give you and your child a chance to learn together. They teach basic skills and child development to adults. They also teach your child.

Call the Mass Adult Literacy Hotline at 1-800-447-8844 for:

- Family literacy programs
- English as a second language (ESL) classes
- Basic skills classes

Call your school department or local community center to find out about computer classes.

Discipline Means Teaching

Your job as a parent is to teach your child what behavior is okay and safe, and what is not. This is one of the hardest things you will do as a parent. Different behaviors are acceptable in different families. Discipline takes time and patience. Discipline does not mean punishment. It is not harsh. Discipline is for teaching your child. It is **not** a way for you to express your feelings.

The goal of discipline is for your child to learn to choose healthy behaviors. To help your child learn good behavior:

- Create a safe and secure environment.
- Make clear and consistent rules.
- Set a good example—be a role model.
- Reward good behavior.

Discipline is very different for an infant, a two-year old, and a four-year old.

Babies, until about 15 months of age, are too young to understand rules.

- Remove things from their reach that are not safe.
- Distract them with toys or activities that are okay.
- Never shake or hit your baby.

Toddlers, until about age 3, need very simple rules.

- Make rules that your child is able to understand and follow.
- Explain the rule ahead of time. Be sure he understands it.
- Keep the same rules every day.

Your child will be better able to follow rules if you:

- Keep simple daily routines.
- Give your child something to do when he needs to sit quietly.
- Give healthy snacks when meals are late.
- Avoid long visits and trips.

Almost all children between the ages of one and three have **temper tantrums** to get your attention or to get their way. If your child has a tantrum:

- Try to be calm. If you are loud or angry or hit your child, he will copy you.
- Make sure he is safe—that he will not hurt himself or others.
- If possible, ignore the behavior. Attention is usually what a child wants the most.
- If you can, take your child with you to a different room or go outside.
- Avoid arguing. It does not work.

Children need to know what to expect.

- A rule tells your child what you expect of him. He also needs to know what will happen if he chooses not to follow the rule.
- Set a simple daily routine. Remind your child about what will happen next.

Children need to be praised and hear that they are loved.

- Reward your child for good behavior.
- Tell your child what you like about what he is doing.
- Even if your child's behavior upsets you, make sure he knows that you still love him.

- Tell your child why his behavior upsets you.
- Give him a chance to understand what he has done.

Children learn by copying what their parents do.

- Tell and show your child what behaviors are okay.
- Show your feelings in ways that do not hurt.
- Try to remain calm. Never take your anger out on your child.
- Do not hit or spank your child. Do not use words that hurt.

You can get help learning how to manage behavior.

- Ask your child's doctor or nurse.
- Talk with other parents.
- Join a parent support group.
- Find out about home visiting programs in your area.
- Take a parenting class.

It is normal for your child's behavior to upset you. Take a break. You can call someone for advice or just to calm down. Call a friend or a parent hotline. Here are three telephone numbers to call for help:

Parental Stress Line 1-800-632-8188

Counseling, open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Parents Helping Parents 1-800-882-1250

Counseling and referrals to support groups

Children's Trust Fund 1-888-775-4KIDS

Free materials and referrals to parenting classes and home visiting programs

When Behavior Is a Problem

There may be times that certain behaviors become a problem. Your child's doctor or nurse can give you a referral to a different provider or counselor for help. Counseling may involve the child, the parents, or the whole family. The goal of counseling is for the parent and child to feel more able to make good choices.

When you speak with the doctor, nurse, or counselor, she may ask:

- What is the problem behavior?
- When does it happen?
- Did the problem start at the same time that something else happened in your family?
- Does your child have habits or fears that concern you?
- Is there a struggle for control with your child?
- What are your child's relationships like with other people?
- How is the rest of the family doing?
- What are your child's strengths?

Loss and Grief

Every human being experiences losses. For a child, a loss can be when someone leaves, when a person or a pet is very sick, when someone dies, or when he loses something. As your child gets older, a loss may mean different things. An adopted or foster child may grieve the loss of birth parents at different times. A child may need to talk about a loss again and again. Help him to:

- **Understand**—When someone dies, this means knowing that the person is no longer alive. A two-year old will not understand death in the same way a four-year old does. It helps to prepare your child if you expect someone to die.
- **Grieve**—Help your child to express his feelings. He may not seem sad when you expect it. Allow him to grieve at his own pace. A child who expresses his feelings can better adjust to the changes.
- **Remember**—You can help your child remember by marking the loss. This can be a religious ceremony or a “remembering ceremony” that your family makes. Your child might want to write a letter to the person who has died, have a backyard funeral, or carry around an object that belonged to the person.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about the loss and how your child is reacting. You can also call the National Center for Death Education at 617-928-4649. They can recommend books and videos and give you referrals for counseling.

Family Violence

Family violence can take many forms: a husband, boyfriend, or lover hurting his or her partner; parents, siblings, relatives, or caretakers hurting children; or an adult hurting an older person. Some types of abuse and common examples are:

Emotional Abuse:

- Name-calling
- Controlling
- Making threats
- Making it hard to stay close to family and friends

Physical Abuse:

- Hitting or slapping
- Pushing
- Kicking
- Choking
- Burning
- Shaking

Sexual Abuse:

- **Any** sexual contact that is not wanted
- **Any** sexual behavior with a child by someone older
- Making sexual remarks or showing body parts in a hurtful way
- Refusing to practice safer sex or birth control

Children, Violence, Abuse, and Neglect

Children are hurt by seeing violence and by being victims of violence. Children can be abused by almost anyone. Children are also affected by watching someone get hurt.

Signs that children may have seen violence or been abused:

- Bruises and other injuries
- New fears and anxiety
- Sleeping problems and nightmares
- Eating problems
- Learning problems
- Aggressive or very shy behavior
- Loss of interest in play
- Problems being close to others
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Inappropriate sexual talk, behavior, or knowledge

Always believe your child if he or she says someone is hurting him or her. Protect your child:

- Teach your child what abuse is.
- Tell your child that he or she never deserves to be hurt.
- Teach him or her the correct names for body parts.
- Let your child know that you want to be told if anyone touches him or her or makes him or her feel uncomfortable.

Never leave your child with someone you do not feel comfortable with and trust.

Getting Safe

If you feel that you or your children are not safe, you need to get help. There are many people who want you to be safe. Talking about it with someone you trust is the first step in getting help and protecting yourself.

Get support and information from a hotline, advocate, counselor, or trusted friend. These people can help you find a way to get safe. These ways can be:

- Staying in the relationship safely
- Leaving the relationship or place in a safe way
- Getting to a new, safe place
- Staying safe
- Getting help with housing, food, and clothes

You can call the police for help getting to a hospital or another safe place. To find help near you, call 411 or the numbers below:

Domestic Violence Hotline 1-877-785-2020

Child-At-Risk Hotline 1-800-792-5200

Rape Crisis Center 1-800-841-8371

Elder Abuse Hotline 1-800-922-2275

Disabled Abuse Hotline 1-800-426-9009

Violence, TV, Movies, and Toys

Children learn violent behavior from seeing it, doing it, and believing it is okay. Some movies, television shows, and toys made for children encourage violence. Watching people hitting and shooting each other on TV can make your child more likely to hit and kick. It can also make her more afraid and less aware of other people's feelings. Violent toys, movies, and TV teach that:

- Violence is the best way to solve problems
- Violence is heroic
- Violence is fun and entertaining

You can help your child:

- Limit or avoid TV
- Select non-violent programs and videos
- Watch TV together and talk about any violence you see
- Talk about non-violent ways to solve conflicts
- Choose toys that help your child to be creative
- Do not choose toys that are linked to violent characters
- Do not choose toy weapons

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